

Message Text

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PAGE 01 PORT A 01850 131411Z

46

ACTION ARA-01

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 PA-01 CU-01 /004 W

----- 123816

O R 121825Z JUL 76

FM AMEMBASSY PORT AU PRINCE

TO USINFO WASHDC IMMEDIATE

INFO SECSTATE WASHDC 2474

UNCLAS PORT AU PRINCE 1850

USIAC

FOR IOP/IPS, IBS, ILA

EO 11652 N/A

SUBJECT: BICENTENNIAL TRIBUTES

THE PAST MONTH HAS WITNESSED A VERITABLE AVALANCHE OF PRO-AMERICAN SENTIMENT IN HAITI IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE BICENTENNIAL, PARTICULARLY AMONG THE MEDIA. TRUE, THE HAITIAN PRESS IS PERHAPS ONE OF THE MORE OBLIGING IN THE HSMISPHERE; BUT IN ADDITION TO IPS, POST AND AFP-SUPPLIED COVERAGE OF EVENTS, THE MEDIA MADE EXTRAORDINARY EFFORTS TO INTERPRET ON THEIR OWN THE SIGNIFICANCE OF OUR 200TH ANNIVERSARY -- PLACING EMPHASIS ON HAITI'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE AMERICAN REVOLUTIONARY WAR AND TO HELP MAKING POSSIBLE THE LOUISIANA PURCHASE. WHILE SOME INTERPRETATION WAS SHALLOW, THE GREATER PART WAS PROFOUND, REFLECTING HAITI'S DEEPLY ROOTED PRIDE IN ITS CLOSE HISTORICAL, GEOGRAPHIC, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL ASSOCIATION WITH THE U.S. NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF AMERICAN SOCIETY WERE NOT SIMPLY GLOSSED OVER; THEY WERE PUT INTO PERSPECTIVE. THE COUNTRY'S MOST OUTSPOKEN PUBLICATION, THE WEEKLY PETIT SAMEDI SOIR, PUBLISHED A LENGTHY TREATISE ENTITLED "THE AMERICAN BICENTENNIAL: TWO HUNDRED YEARS OF SEGREGATION." BUT IT WAS A SERIOUS, BALANCED ARTICLE WHICH, VIEWED AS A WHOLE, DEPICTED A SELF-CORRECTIVE SOCIETY NOT AFRAID TO

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PAGE 02 PORT A 01850 131411Z

ADMIT SHORTCOMINGS AND ATTEMPT TO RESOLVE PROBLEMS.

SIMILARLY, AT A ROUND TABLE, A WELL-READ AND ADMIRER
YOUNG HAITIAN INTELLECTUAL DRIFTED SOMEWHAT FROM THE
THEME AND REMARKED THAT "AMERICA FOR THE AMERICANS"
REALLY MEANT AMERICA FOR THE U.S. AND THAT WHATEVER
AMERICAN ASSISTANCE WAS GIVEN TOWARD LATIN AMERICAN
INDEPENDENCE WAS SELFISHLY MOTIVATED. BUT OLDER AND
PERHAPS WISER OBSERVERS OF THE AMERICAN SCENE COUNTERED
HIS ARGUMENTS.

AS REPORTED EARLIER, A MOSTLY HAITIAN COMMITTEE
SPONSORED THE LIFE, LIBERTY AND PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS
EXHIBIT; ORGANIZED A ROUND TABLE; HELD FILM SHOWINGS;
AND COMMEMORATED THE ROLE OF HAITIAN VOLUNTEERS AT
THE BATTLE OF SAVANNAH. ONE COMMITTEE MEMBER WROTE
A BOOK ON HAITIAN PARTICIPATION IN AMERICAN
INDEPENDENCE, AND ITS INFLUENCE ON HAITI'S OWN WAR
FOR INDEPENDENCE (1791-1803) -- WHICH DESTROYED A
40,000 MAN FRENCH ARMY THAT NAPOLEON HOPED ULTIMATELY
TO SEND TO LOUISIANA. THEY NEEDED LITTLE COAXING. A
GROUP OF YOUNG ARTISTS HELD AN IMPRESSIVE EXHIBIT OF
CERAMICS, COLLAGES AND OTHER ART FORMS WITH
BICENTENNIAL THEMES, A PURELY SPONTANEOUS ACT IN WHICH
THE MISSION WAS NOT DIRECTLY INVOLVED. AND IN MANY
WAYS - A LARGE AND SMALL, PRIVATE AND PUBLIC, IN POETRY
AND MUSIC - HAITIANS FROM ALL WALKS OF LIFE PAID TRIBUTE
TO AMERICA.

IN CONCLUSION, THE BICENTENNIAL HAS SHOWN THAT MOST
EDUCATED HAITIANS LOOK TO THE U.S. -- WHERE MANY
HAITIAN FAMILIES NOW HAVE CLOSE TIES DUE TO EMIGRATION --
NOT ONLY FOR ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE, BUT ALSO AS AN
EXAMPLE OF A COUNTRY WHOSE MORAL, SPIRITUAL, SOCIAL AND
POLITICAL VALUES THEY HOLD DEAR. THEY DEMONSTRATE
A KEEN SENSE OF AMERICAN HISTORY, AND THE PAST AND
PRESENT U.S. ROLE IN WORLD AFFAIRS. THIS IS NOT TO SAY
THAT THERE ARE NO MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT THE U.S. INDEED,
THERE ARE, PARTICULARLY AMONG THE YOUNGER, LESS
SCHOLARLY AND IMPRESSIONABLE HAITIANS. BUT THE
BICENTENNIAL DID SERVE TO RE-KINDLE AN AWARENESS OF AND
INTEREST IN AMERICAN SOCIETY, A NEW WAVE OF CURIOSITY
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PAGE 03 PORT A 01850 131411Z

ABOUT A GIANT NEIGHBOR THAT HAS MEANT SO MANY THINGS
TO THE HEMISPHERE'S SECOND OLDEST REPUBLIC.
GOMEZ

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PRESS COMMENTS, BICENTENNIAL CELEBRATIONS, GOVERNMENT REACTIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 12 JUL 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: n/a
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: n/a
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment:
Disposition Date: 01 JAN 1960
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976PORTA01850
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760269-0693
From: PORT AU PRINCE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760768/aaaachnk.tel
Line Count: 110
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: n/a
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: schaeafaj
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 12 FEB 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <12 FEB 2004 by ThomasVJ>; APPROVED <16 SEP 2004 by schaeafaj>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: BICENTENNIAL TRIBUTES THE PAST MONTH HAS WITNESSED A VERITABLE AVALANCHE
TAGS: SCUL, PDEV, HA, US
To: USIA
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006